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## Demographic Changes in the life of the Bedouin Population in Israel in the 21st century

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## Demographic Changes in the life of the Bedouin Population in Israel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

### ***Abstract***

The aim of this paper is to review the characteristics of the Bedouin population in the Negev. I would like to present basic data, taken from the existing literature and official reports that show how the impact of state policies affects the standard of living of the Bedouin population in the fields of education, health, income and employment, and in the social realm.

This paper observes closely the demographic structure and the situation of Bedouin villages in the Negev as well as the way in which local government bodies were negatively affected financially due to the inequalities that exist in Israel. Finally, I note that the reason for this gap is an “anorexic” policy of the state. Since the Negev Bedouins live in the southern part of the country, they are in the midst of the struggle for equal rights in all spheres of life. They also take part in the struggle of all the peacekeeping forces in Israel, Arabs and Jews, against the occupation and for peace, the protection of democratic freedoms, for workers’ rights and economic welfare, and for full equality for all citizens in all areas, a condition that affects the standard of living in the area where the Bedouin population lives.

As a result, the Bedouin Arab population ranks lowest in the socio-economic status, even though the purpose of urbanization was, as declared by the governments of Israel, “to improve and modernize” the life of Bedouins in the Negev through resettlement programs.

### ***Introduction***

The Bedouin society in the Negev has been undergoing rapid change, from a nomadic life style to that of permanent settlement, a change which affects all the different areas of life (Ben-David, 1993 p. 7). The Arab-Bedouin population is a distinct social group within the Arab society in Israel. It comprises

more than 25% of the total Arab population in the country. It is the poorest and weakest social group in Israel. The standard of living of Bedouins, in general, and that of those living in unrecognized settlements in particular, is much lower than the average standard of living in Jewish settlements and in Arab Israeli settlements. Most Bedouin settlements lack basic services such as welfare, education, and healthcare. (Abu Ras 2011 p. 4)

The never-ending process of settling the status of the unrecognized Bedouin settlements in the Negev is symbolic of the long history of neglect experienced by the Bedouin population, and of its exclusion from public awareness and from under governmental and social responsibility. A recent change of tendencies reveals the evident lack of information regarding the Bedouin population of the Negev, their numbers and characteristics. It is the only population in Israel with regard to which there is no accurate demographic data, for several reasons: ongoing institutional neglect, existence of unrecognized settlements, population register according to tribes, high mobility, and marriage to women without citizenship. (Praver, 2006 p. 3)

### ***The Arab population in Israel***

Israeli society is a highly heterogenic one – with many sectors and sub-populations, distinct from one another in their financial and material characteristics – and one-fifth of which is Arab. At the end of 2015, the Arab population in Israel consisted of 1,754,000 individuals (20.7% from the general population which was 8,448,600). This number includes the 360,500 Arab residents of East Jerusalem, which renders the total Arab population in Israel to be 1,189,500, 17% of the total population. (Statistics calendar 2015 No 59)

The local government in Israel plays a considerable role in the economic and political activities: it provides physical services (water, sanitation, urban planning) and social services (education, health, and welfare), and it carries out infrastructural and other complex projects. This makes the local government the second important governance institution after the government, since it is the only one that has a big budget in many areas of activity with most tangible implications for residents' life. Moreover, in a democratic state the local authority represents local democracy, and one of its roles is to promote democracy and freedom of the individual.

Arab local government in Israel has certain particular characteristics that derive from the special situation of the population in Israel. Today there are

about seventy local governments, including the Druse local authorities in Israel. These authorities provide services for about 15% of the population of the land of Israel (and 5% of all the non-Jewish population does not have municipal standing, primarily the Bedouin in the Negev, or are included in the mixed cities). For many years the Arab local government in Israel has been under crisis, and the continuation of this crisis entails additional frictions between the Arab population and the State.

A decision to establish local governments in the Arab communities was the main step in the plans of the policy-makers. However, involvement of the residents in the local government was limited, since the military rule imposed by the government of Israel intervened directly in local activities in all the Arab cities and villages until 1966. The status of Arab authorities in the State of Israel has been derived from the status of the Arab population as perceived by the central government since the establishment of the state and it reflects the nature of the unique relations between them (Heider, 2010 p. 123)

To understand the way in which the Arab minority in Israel perceives the local government, it is necessary to note its status in the State of Israel in general: Arab citizens of Israel are a small, native, peripheral minority lacking influence in the Israeli society. The attitude towards them was determined already with the establishment of the State, and all the governments of Israel since then have adopted a clear ethnocentric policy of exclusion of the Arab population from society.

This policy intended to separate Jews from Arabs and to isolate the Arab society socially and institutionally. Thus, the Arabs are not represented in the economic, military, and cultural elite of the country, and they are excluded from the decision-making entities. In addition, the Israeli local government sought to prevent the cohesion of the Arab minority by advocating the separation of religious and ethnic groups; rendering Arabs dependent on Jewish economy; and the prohibiting the establishment of separate national, political, and cultural Arab groups. In addition, the number of Arabs employed in public institutions and actively involved in the government and public systems in Israel is very low and is not proportional to the part of the Arabs in the population. (Jinem & Azaziya, 2008 p. 67)

## ***The Bedouin Population In The Negev***

The Bedouin in the Negev are a part of the Palestinian Arab minority that remained in Israel after 1948. The Bedouin tribes have lived in the Negev since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and traditionally have led a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle, raising flocks of sheep and pursuing traditional agriculture (Abu-Saad, 2007 p. 125).

According to different assessments, before 1948 the Bedouin Arab population in the Negev was 65 to 90 thousand people (Falah, 1990 p. 88; Maddrell, 1989 p. 71).

During the war in 1948 and afterwards, most of the Bedouins of the Negev fled or were expelled and became refugees in different Arab countries. In 1951, about eleven thousand Bedouins remained in the Negev. The State of Israel took over most of the land of the Negev Desert, so that the Bedouin people remaining in the Negev lost their freedom to wander with their flocks from place to place and to work on their lands (Abu-Saad & Litwick, 2000 p. 25). Out of the nineteen Bedouin tribes that remained in the Negev, most were expelled from their lands, and the whole Bedouin population was concentrated in a defined area called the 'Restricted Zone.' Until 1966 the Bedouin lived under a military regime, as did other Arabs in the State of Israel. Due to the military regime it was not possible for the Bedouin to return to work on their land, they were isolated from the rest of the Arab population in other areas of Israel, and they were required to present special permits to leave the 'Restricted Zone' for purposes of work, education, commerce, and so on. Restrictions imposed on them by the government of Israel forced them to lead a sedentary lifestyle, and thus in essence ended their traditional nomadic and semi-nomadic life.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2014 this population numbered 223,300, which constituted 15.7% of the total Arab citizens in Israel and represented 27.4% of the total population of the Negev. Around 61,600 (32% of the Bedouins in the Negev) lived in unrecognized villages. This had not yet been officially recognized by the government and had no basic infrastructure or services. (Statistics calendar 2014 No 65)

The Bedouin population in the Negev is relatively young in comparison to the Jewish population and to the Arab population in Israel in general. According to data for 2007, the percentage of those aged zero to fourteen and those aged zero to nineteen among the Bedouin in the Negev is twice or more as high as the parallel percentage in the Jewish population. The median age

of the Bedouin population in the Negev, especially among residents of the unrecognized Bedouin villages, is significantly lower than the median age of the entire Arab population and is twice and more lower than the median age in the Jewish population.

The rate of natural growth of the Bedouin population in the Negev. (5.37 per family) was always significantly higher than the rate of natural growth of the entire Arab population and the Jewish population in Israel (with the exception of the *Haredi* or Ultra-Orthodox Jewish population). The natural growth in the Bedouin population is high because of the especially high fertility rate. The overall fertility rate in the Bedouin population is nearly twice the parallel rate of the entire Arab population, and two and a half times the parallel rate of the Jewish population. According to the 2005 data, the natural growth among the Bedouin in the Negev was 4.3%, double the natural growth of the Arab population in the Galilee, 2.1% (Maximoff, 2010 p. 26)

Prevalence of postpartum depression symptoms among Bedouin women in the Negev is around 31–43%, therefore setting our research population at 2487–3450 women a year. (Alfayumi, Ziadna Samira 2014, p. 33)

It can be concluded that the high rate of natural increase among the Negev Bedouin and other Arab populations is not necessarily due to religious factors, but cultural factors unique for Bedouin society. One reason for the high rate of natural increase is a desire among the Bedouin group (tribe, clan, extended family) to grow stronger in order to withstand power struggles. Polygamy rate of Negev Bedouin population in 2002 was 30%. This means that almost every third Bedouin man has at least two women. (Rudnicki, 2013 p. 13).

### ***The Recognized Bedouin Communities in Israel***

In the years 1969–1996, the State of Israel established seven permanent towns for the Bedouin population in the Negev (Tel-Sheva, Rahat, Hura, Kuseife, Lakiya, Arara in the Negev, and Segev-Shalom). Rahat received the status of a city in 1994, and the rest were defined as local councils. According to the data of the Central Bureau of Statistics (in Bass Spector {2011}), in 2008 all the communities in the Bedouin population in the Negev were ranked in cluster 1 of 10 in the socioeconomic index.

In the years 1996–2000, the State decided to establish eight additional recognized towns to belong to the Abu-Basma Regional Council, six to be urban and two to be villages. In addition, the Planning Administration proposed to

recognize two unrecognized towns in the framework of the district plan for the Beer Shiva Metropolis.

Concentration of the Bedouin in the new Development Towns is the outcome of a policy aimed at diminishing the geographical habitat of the Bedouin, and reinforcing the supervision placed upon them. (Meir, 1999 p. 2).

Therefore, the Bedouin settlements have been erected within small areas of jurisdiction, in comparison to other non-Bedouin settlements. The Bedouin settlements' design was done by the Israel Land Administration without consulting their future Bedouin inhabitants. The planning did not take into account the land conflict and the many ownership claims of residents of the newly designated settlement jurisdictions.

The land and planning rights of the Bedouin in the Negev also derive from the fact that they are an indigenous population, defined in international proclamations and conventions and in publications of different United Nations Committees as a population that was subordinated to the government of modern countries after they, for generations, had lived under self-governance.

A prevalent approach towards indigenous peoples in democratic countries is transitional justice, which enables the system of public policy to create unique norms for indigenous groups, so as to maintain their rights and property in a situation of transition between regimes. It is important to note that the land is the most central axis of the struggle of indigenous people, because of the supreme importance of indigenous cultures and following the extensive dispossession of the indigenous peoples throughout the world. The attitude towards the land is not expressed solely in its property value for the individual but in the fact that it is the homeland for the entire community.

Land is the link between the community and all the areas of life, and therefore the meanings attributed to it are most profound. There is an extensive agreement that the Bedouin population in the Negev meets the criteria of an indigenous population and the struggle that it experiences brings to mind many dimensions of the struggles of other indigenous nations in the world. In 2002, the Forum for Issues of Indigenous People was established, and in 2007 it accepted into its ranks the representatives of the Bedouin from Israel. In 2005, the representatives of the Bedouin from Israel began to participate regularly in annual discussions of the forum held in New York. The Forum prepares regular reports on the human rights situation of the indigenous populations, and these reports raise awareness of the indigenous people's situation and to the violation of their rights, and places the issue on the international

agenda (Master Plan for the Recognition of Unrecognized Villages in the Negev, 201 p. 45)

A Bedouin who moves to one of the urban communities that the government planned for them, exists in a political-economic bubble. On the one hand, urban communities lack suitable systems of infrastructure and employment that will allow for economic activities and standards of living similar to those in Jewish towns nearby. On the other hand, both the recognized and the unrecognized Bedouin villages are generally not included in the governmental development projects, both national ones and those intended for the Negev desert.

The level of the supply of services and of the connection to the urban infrastructure in the Bedouin villages is significantly lower in comparison to the level in the overall Arab population. While the absolute majority of the Arab communities in Israel are connected to the national water and electric infrastructure and they are almost all connected to the sewage infrastructure, about one-third of the Bedouin residents in permanent towns are forced to connect to a private system of water supply or to create their own electricity using private generators. A miserable picture arises from the examination of the situation of the sewage infrastructure: about two-thirds of the residents in the Bedouin towns are not connected to the national sewage infrastructure but to sewage pits (Rodnisky 2013 p. 34).

Abu Sa'ad and Litviks' (2000) comprehensive research pointed out the towns' failure regarding infrastructure and service provision. Decades after those settlements' foundation, their local economy is yet to be developed. The harsh conditions in the recognized settlements have led to many rulings on the regional and state levels, in which the government determined to improve the image of the recognized settlements, especially by improving infrastructure, education, hygiene, and public facilities.

### ***The Unrecognized Bedouin Communities in Israel***

For the Bedouin living in the unrecognized communities in Israel, life exists in a legal-political bubble. The State of Israel prevents them from living in permanent homes and denies them the basic right of registering their residence in their identity documents. They lack a local government, and they cannot implement their basic political right of voting and being elected to a local government. They are denied full governmental services, they are denied exercising

their basic property right of purchasing and selling residences. Moreover, they are ruled by organizations established by the state explicitly to control them and only them, separately from the rest of the Israelis (Sabirsky & Hasson, 2005 p. 3).

The residents of the communities found in the jurisdiction of the Jewish municipal authorities, such as the Bnei Shimon and the Ramat HaNegev Regional Councils, do not receive services from these municipalities (Yiftachel, 2003 p. 23). The actual significance of an unrecognized town is that it does not have a master plan, and therefore it is not possible to obtain building permits. Consequently, all construction, whether a private residence or a public building or infrastructure, is illegal and is at risk of destruction.

The unrecognized Bedouin communities do not appear on the official maps of the State of Israel and their residents are 'transparent': the State does not see them when it comes to setting policies, building the budget, providing services legal defense; their Jewish neighbors see them only as an annoyance whose dimensions should be reduced as much as possible. These communities do not receive orderly governmental services: municipal budgets, water, electricity, sewage services, and education services. In addition, these services do not have a local system of government (Almi, 2003 p. 21).

The Goldberg Committee Report on the issue of the arrangement of the Bedouin settlement in the Negev mentioned the physical infrastructure in the towns of the Diaspora. Since they are unrecognized, the villages do not receive municipal budgets, they do not have a local government system, and the residents do not pay taxes and property tax. Lacking a master plan, they are forbidden any construction, it is not possible to obtain building permits, and all building is illegal. The population in these villages does not receive orderly governmental services, and they do not have most of the basic infrastructure (water, electric, sewage, roads, etc.) The quality of water is terrible and only some of the residents are connected with private water lines to the main pipes in the road, while the rest bring water in containers from a distance. (Bass Spector, 2011 p. 17)

### ***Socio-economic characteristics***

**Education:** according to a recent study performed among postpartum women, half of them have less than 10 years of education, 43% have high-school education, and only 6.9% acquired academic education, out of whom 3.8%

obtained university degrees, and 2.8% obtained college degrees (statistical calendar 2014 p. 14)

**Income and Employment:** the Bedouin population in Israel is rated lowest in socio-economic measures in Israel. All seven permanent Bedouin settlements in the Negev, as well as the unrecognized settlements, are rated as the lowest quanta of Israeli population. Only 10–14% Bedouin women are part of the workforce. (Alfiumi Ziadna 2014 p. 65)

Lewin Epstein (1992) claims that even though the share of Bedouin women in the Israeli work market has grown, it is still much lower than that of Jewish women. The Arab population resides mostly in villages and small towns, distant from most of the country's occupational centers, and lacking the infrastructure that can enable occupational opportunities. The higher the education level and urbanism are in a settlement, the bigger is the share of women in that settlement's workforce.

**Epidemiologic data:** PPD and its influence on the mother and child's mental and physical situation: PPD is a common mental disorder prevalent with 10–20% of postpartum women. However, among Bedouin women, PPD rates of 31–43% were found (Glasser, 2011 p. 203). PPD is defined as depressive behavior lasting for a 4-to-52-week period after giving birth, and is characterized by a significant decline in mood and activity, decreased or increased appetite, lack or oversleep, irritation, psycho-motoric suppression, fatigue or lack of energy, inability to concentrate, negative thinking, decline in self-confidence and self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts. PPD has a lasting negative influence on the infant's cognitive, verbal and emotional development, and women suffering from PPD are likely to develop weaker connection with the baby, and in extreme cases even to hurt their baby. In addition, PPD malignantly influences the parents' relationship. (Sharma, Mazmina, 2014 p. 171).

**Environmental and behavioral risk factors:** Risk factors for PPD are anxiety during pregnancy, stressful life events, lack of social support, lack of partner's support, unplanned pregnancy, being a single-parent mother or living separately from the partner, problematic relations, and domestic violence. It was also found that PPD is correlated with personal characteristics such as the mother's personality, mental stress, age, language, domestic status, education, income, baby's demands, problems in relations and history of depression, as well as behavioral factors such as smoking, drug abuse, lack of physical activity and malnourishment. Moreover, PPD is one of the most common mental problems related to a history of domestic violence, a factor raising its probability to occur

by two to threefold. PPD is more likely to occur when the woman lacks family and social support, when she is part of a polygamous family structure or when her partner is unsupportive. Several researchers have examined polygamy, which is very prevalent in Bedouin society, but it is hard to measure especially since most polygamous marriages are not documented. Nevertheless, researchers estimated that 35.9% of all marriages in the Bedouin sector are polygamous. (Alkinawi, 2006, p. 46)

**Gaps in mental health care:** In Israel there is a considerable gap between the Arab and Jewish populations regarding the rate of individuals reporting mental stress, approaching the mental health services, as well as in the availability of these services to the two populations. The rate of Arab citizens reporting mental stress is higher than among the Jewish population. According to a survey from 2007, a higher rate of Jewish adults (8.6%) than that of Arab adults (3.8%) **יא רוקמב המאתה** have reported turning for help while suffering tension or stress, during the year before the survey was conducted. A 2004–2005 survey suggests that the prevalence of mental disturbances among youth was 11.7%, both among Arabs and Jews. Nevertheless, big gaps were found in obtaining healthcare, with 54% of the Jewish youth not receiving help, while among Arab youth the rate was 91%. (Pernstein, 2010, p. 630)

The mental health array serving the Arab population in general, and the Bedouin population in particular, is in very bad condition. Except for a single mental health clinic operated by the Ministry of Health in Rahat, which only accepts adults, there are no other mental health clinics in Bedouin settlements. A report by the health team of the specialists' committee of the Social struggle from 2012 shows that in order to receive mental help, residents need to go to the psychiatric clinic in Soroka medical center, or to clinics located in Jewish settlements in the Negev, in which case they have to overcome the bad public transport or defective infrastructure of the Bedouin settlements, as well as the economic barrier of having to pay for those services. According to the report, in addition to the lack of clinics, there is also a significant lack of Arab speaking work force in the mental health occupations, something that places yet another barrier for those in need of treatment. For example, there are only 5 Arab speaking professionals employed in the field of child and grown-up psychiatry in Israel. A Doctors for Human Rights report shows that the share of Arab-speaking psychologists in Israel is only 2.58% of the total. Those deficits in availability are a blunt breach in the right to health, according to how it is defined by the National Health Insurance Law.

## **Resources:**

**Social capital:** according to Baron-Epel (2008), the Arab population in Israel retains poor social capital in relation to the Jewish one. One of the reasons is that Jewish society is richer and more individualistic than Arab society, which is more conservative, patriarchal and collective, and is a minority suffering from ethnic discrimination in fields such as employment and governmental funding. Arab communities are more collective, and their general distrust derives from the lack of trust in anyone outside the expanded family. The lack of trust prevalent within the local authorities, manned by Arab citizens, can be explained by those local authorities suffering from a lack of resources.

The social ties in the Arab society are stronger than in the Jewish one, due to its lifestyle and close-knit families. Nevertheless, these strong ties are not translated into functional social support or improved health, but rather into more stress applied on the individual. Most Arab citizens live close by their families and hardly mobilize themselves, which badly influences any potential social support due to conflicts arising within the family. Societies with poor social capital do not benefit from its positive effects on health, even if they live in countries with other high social capital groups, and even if the state allegedly offers the same social benefits such as national health insurance and social security.

**Political resources:** Haled Arar (2013 p. 51) says that since the establishment of the state and up until the local elections of 1998, only 12 Arab women were elected as members in Arab local councils, and only one performed as a council chairwoman. That is the result of an intentional strife of the paternal ruling elements of the social, political and municipal mechanisms, in their attempt to hinder any female representation in the public sphere. The tribal factor has great influence in local politics, one that even highly ideological parties cannot ignore. Despite the vast changes which took place in the Arab villages, especially the rise of the education level among men and women and their intensified assimilation in the Israeli economy, most rural populations decided to deal with these changes by reinforcing the existing traditional structures.

## Summary

Demographic and social changes the Bedouin society is undergoing since the founding of the Israeli state affect in the end both directly and indirectly the quality of the Bedouin life

Due to many hardships in everyday life, the Bedouin population lives both in official and unofficial settlements. Communities face hardship and poverty. Due to these changes the Bedouin began to lose their unique identity, their history and their heritage. "Status of the economic, social, traditional Bedouin undermined by the rapid transition from their traditional lifestyle urban society of the 20th century. These changes were made without any prior preparation in both the cultural and socio-economic and employment". This transition is accompanied by signs of distress: a marked increase in unemployment; crime rates and drug use rising steadily; the rate of school dropouts is among the highest in the country; matriculation exams success rate is among the lowest in the country, and more.

Due to security reasons, a modern state such as Israel does not allow groups of nomadic populations to live according to their traditions. The prevalent political and security situation demands that the Bedouin population reside in permanent settlements, which means narrowing down their habitat and pasture areas. This situation has brought the state to uproot many members of the Bedouin population of the Negev, and to build Jewish settlements, army bases, and animal farms in their place.

Due to the sharp transfer of Bedouins from nomadic life to permanent settlements, without consulting or including them in the planning of the new settlements (Tel Sheva, Kseiffe, Hura, Segev Shalom, Ar'ara, Lokia and Rahat) the government has put emphasis on separating Hamulas, with every neighborhood populated by a separate social framework. (a tribal-like structure).

Some of the many changes which occurred due to the swift move from life in a tent to life in a house, are taking place in the life patterns of the Bedouin population. The most prominent one is taking place in the socio-cultural dimension, in which the proximity to the Jewish sector brings along the imitation of its life patterns. Therefore, many difficulties arise in different aspects of that proximity: weakening of the tribal-Hamula structure, changes in women's status, different families and Hamulas living close to one another while before they lived in totally separate areas, and a mismatch between the changes in economics and lifestyle to the population's embedded socio-cultural patterns.

As opposed to many plans intended for the Bedouin population in the Negev, and the resources allocated to improving the standards of living in the recognized settlements, there is still a vast gap between the Bedouin and Jewish populations, the infrastructure is insufficient, and the unemployment rate is high.

In recent years, the Bedouins have experienced a big crisis of trust between them and the state, due to the Prayer Program stipulating the expropriation of many Bedouin lands in order to bestow them on other municipalities and to build Jewish settlements on them. This crisis brought a wave of appeals to courts and UN committees in an attempt to defend the weak Bedouin population. The expanding public debate around this issue has brought retaliation in the shape of sharp rise in house demolitions, which amounted to a thousand houses in 2015, leaving many families homeless and in distress.

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